

HERMIT CRAB PARADISE » LAND HERMIT CRAB CARE SHEET

This care sheet aims to provide an **extremely brief** introduction to land hermit crabs. It should not replace counselling with experienced land hermit crab owners. If well cared for, hermit crabs can live for over 34 years in captivity, as demonstrated by Carol Ormes in the USA. Like humans, all pets ought to die of old age, rather than due to misunderstanding.

- Wild hermit crabs live in large colonies in **warm, humid** areas. Adopt at least two hermit crabs, so neither will feel lonely.
- Any water that you use for your hermit crabs (e.g. for drinking water and food preparation) must be treated with a de-chlorinator that removes chlorine, chloramines and heavy metals from tap water. Distilled water is also an alternative.
- New hermit crabs should be bathed in de-chlorinated or distilled water before introducing them to the tank.
- Hermit crabs must be kept in a **glass tank** with a **glass lid** or **PMMA lid**, not a plastic carrier or a wire cage. The glass tank should be **no smaller than 38 litres** big and can hold up to five small hermit crabs. The lid should almost cover the entire top of the tank, but has a small air hole or two to allow for air circulation. The lid is essential for holding in **heat** and **humidity**.
- Check the temperature with a **calibrated thermometer**. Hermit crabs produce almost no body heat as they are **poikilothermic**, so keep one end of the tank warm with a **thermostat-controlled** heat source. A **Zoo Med ReptiTherm® Under Tank Heater** works well for small tanks, while a **ceramic heat emitter** is also suitable for large tanks. The cool end of the tank should be at least **21°C**, while the warm end of the tank should approximate **28°C**. Incandescent bulbs may be used, but they will irritate the hermit crabs if they are constantly flicked on and off by the thermostat at night. Hermit crabs should not be exposed to bright light at night. Thermostats may seem expensive, but you will save money on electricity over time.
- Check the humidity with a **calibrated hygrometer**. Hermit crabs must keep their gills moist to breathe, so maintain the humidity in the tank between **75–85%**. **Mist** the air inside the tank with de-chlorinated water to raise humidity levels. Do not spray the hermit crabs directly. Avoid sponges as they can house harmful bacteria and do not really help boost humidity.
- The thermometer and hygrometer should be placed just above the bedding where the hermit crabs spend most of their time.
- **Pure (100%) coconut fibre** (sold in compressed bricks) and **oolitic (ultra-fine) aragonite sand** are ideal substrates for hermit crabs. If you cannot afford oolitic aragonite sand, smooth silica sand is a suitable alternative. Do not use 'hermit crab sand' products, gravel, crushed coral, shell grit, wood shavings, shredded paper or **CareFRESH®** as bedding, since hermit crabs cannot moult safely in them. Coconut fibre must be kept moist with salt water, while oolitic sand can be used either moist or dry. The depth of the bedding should be at least double the height of your largest hermit crab to allow it to fully bury itself.
- You will need **two separate water ponds** and a **food dish**. These do not have to be fancy rock pool dishes. A plastic container is suitable, as long as you provide secure safety routes out of them. Hermit crabs will drown if they cannot climb out of the water. Hermit crabs should have access to both fresh and salt water at all times. The water should be deep enough for most of your hermit crabs to be able to fully submerge themselves. Unless the ponds are filtered, change the water daily.
- Only use a brand of sea salt if it **specifically states** that it is designed for **salt water fish**. Do not use 'hermit crab salt', table salt, iodised salt or kitchen-grade sea salts. The salt water is ideally concentrated if a **hydrometer** (not to be confused with a hygrometer) gives specific gravity readings between **1.021–1.025** when immersed in the water at **25°C**.
- Hermit crabs are **omnivores** and must eat both meat and plant matter. Ideally, fruits and vegetables should be **organic**; otherwise, wash the food thoroughly with water. Freeze-dried foods are suitable as long as they do not contain pesticides or preservatives. Meat should be free of seasoning and can be offered raw or lightly cooked with olive oil. Hermit crabs prefer eating something different each day. A few healthy examples of food for hermit crabs include fresh fish, chicken, beef, spirulina, shrimp, cuttlebone, oak leaves, honey, coconut, carrots, apples, grapes and calendula. Replace uneaten food daily.
- Avoid commercial 'hermit crab food' products as they often contain potentially **harmful preservatives** such as ethoxyquin and copper sulphate. Do not offer any processed foods such as bread or rice crackers. Some other foods that should not be offered (but are not limited to) include garlic, onion, citrus leaves and branches, peppermint and eucalyptus.
- Do not dig up any hermit crab that has buried itself. Hermit crabs will feel stressed and insecure if their privacy is violated.
- Hermit crabs must undergo a **life-threatening** process called **moulting** to grow. Be careful not to mistake the shed exoskeleton for a corpse. Most hermit crabs will bury themselves for at least two weeks to moult. If your hermit crab moults on the surface, set up a glass or plastic barrier around the moulter and its shed exoskeleton. Make sure that the other hermit crabs cannot dig under or climb over the barrier. Do not touch the moulter or throw away the shed exoskeleton, as the moulter needs to eat it to regain lost nutrients. Additional stress factors such as low humidity, bad substrate and malnutrition will **almost certainly kill** a moulter. Stress symptoms include dropped limbs and abandonment of shells. **Never wet** a moulter until it has fully hardened. Healthy hermit crabs usually moult at least once every eight months.
- Provide plenty of climbing and hiding toys for your hermit crabs. However, do not take your hermit crabs outdoors.
- Provide a wide variety of **unpainted** spare shells for your hermit crabs to change into, as they will eventually outgrow the one that they are wearing. The shells should not have any holes or broken parts in them as hermit crabs need to store water inside the shells. Do not be fooled by so-called 'chip-proof' and 'non-toxic' painted shells. Hermit crabs have no trouble chipping away parts of their shells, let alone paint layers. Since hermit crabs will nibble on anything placed in the tank, the paint is a health hazard and may cause **moult-defects** if ingested. Never attempt to pull a hermit crab out of its shell.
- Keep coniferous woods (e.g. pine), pesticide sprays, insect repellents, perfumes and deodorants away from hermit crabs.